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CHINA/TAIWAN: A QUICK TAKEDOWN?

CORE COURSE V ESSAY

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TO Admiral Perry, CINCPAC

FROM John R. Nay, Polad

SUBJECT Possible PRC Action Against Taiwan

SUMMARY Recent PRC actions and rhetoric in response to Taiwan's continuing efforts to gain international legitimacy have prompted a significant increase in cross-Strait tensions. Those tensions are now so serious that I believe Beijing authorities may intend to attempt a preemptive military takedown and forced unification with Taiwan before Taiwan's presidential election campaign next spring. That election campaign inevitably would bring further calls for independence, and the PRC's patience on this issue may now be exhausted. Furthermore, despite longstanding assumptions that Taiwan could hold out against an attack for some time, the PRC may have reason to believe it could pull off a quick coup. If that is the case, unless we are prepared to intervene immediately we might be faced with a fait accompli. Based on past experience, however, there may be no plan for an immediate intervention, and any U.S. decision on whether to intervene would be formulated in an ad hoc manner based primarily on the popular and Congressional mood of the day rather than on long-term U.S. interests.

We should do what we can to push Washington to focus on the issue, with a view toward 1) forestalling a conflict if at all possible, or 2) systematically examining how the U.S. should react in the event of various scenarios. Appropriate Congressional members and staff should be included in the process to the extent possible. Executive branch/Congressional squabbling, as well as an all-too-frequent tendency on both sides to focus on narrow issues, have significantly damaged the U.S. ability to influence our overall relationship with China. We must move quickly, keeping overall U.S. interests and objectives in mind, if we hope to prevent a conflict which at a minimum would destroy the progress made in East Asian relations in recent years and at worst could risk escalation to a U.S. - China nuclear confrontation.

Outlined below is a possible scenario for a swift and potentially successful PRC campaign

using internal attacks by covertly infiltrated Special Forces coordinated with cross-Strait strikes and a massive psyops campaign. You will note that this scenario theory differs significantly from the widely accepted idea that a PRC takeover attempt would require either 1) PRC declaration of a blockade of Taiwan's foreign trade (as part of an effort to topple Taiwan slowly), or 2) the buildup of a massive amphibious landing force for use across the Taiwan Strait.¹ Quick internal attacks might accomplish most PRC objectives within 3-5 days, leaving the U S with sharply reduced options involving only direct confrontation with the PRC, a decision fraught with the risk of nuclear brinkmanship. It is therefore essential that the U S have appropriate courses of action (COA) to handle the scenarios we may meet in coming months. A few suggestions to that end also are discussed below. **END SUMMARY**

INTRODUCTION

The launching of a credible PRC attack on Taiwan seems more likely than at any time in decades. In fact, at no time since the U S intervention just prior to the Korean War has the PRC enjoyed as strong a confluence of motive, means, and opportunity. All three factors must be considered.

MOTIVE

The PRC has long made clear that it "would not rule out the use of force" if Taiwan moved toward independence. Beijing may now feel that several reasons compel it to act on that warning. First, past warnings have produced only short-term results. Recall that in March 1996 the PRC conducted unprecedentedly extensive military exercises near Taiwan as part of an explicit attempt to indicate to Taiwan voters the risks of moving toward independence. The exercises used missiles fired into a splash zone only 30 nautical miles from Kaohsiung and just over 12 nautical miles from Keelung to demonstrate a clear PRC ability to seal the island. The result was the

¹see for example Paul H B Godwin, "The Use of Military Force Against Taiwan: Potential PRC Scenarios," If China Crosses the Taiwan Strait: The International Response, ed Parris H Chang and Martin L Lasater (Lanham: University Press of America, 1993) 15-33

effective blockading of the two ports through which over 70 per cent of Taiwan's trade moves and the airspace needed for some 30 daily international flights ² The exercises succeeded to the extent that they passed a clear message and that Taiwan authorities were careful to avoid further provocations -- for a few months. Then the newly reelected Lee, with a mandate probably actually even stronger due to his careful handling of the PRC exercises, renewed his efforts to break out of Taiwan's long-term political isolation. While there is no doubt that DPP pressure from the left helped support him in such moves, Lee clearly was making his own choices.

Several such actions provoked the Mainland to stronger rhetoric than we have previously seen. FBIS has analyzed the stronger PRC rhetorical flourishes that followed Lee's high profile visits to several ASEAN countries, Taiwan's various joint military exercises (admittedly small scale) with Singaporean, Philippine, and Vietnamese troops, and most importantly Lee's visits last year to Japan and the United States. PRC protests barely succeeded in heading off a Lee address to the Diet in Tokyo, and of course failed to prevent an address to Congress. One recent set of warnings seem particularly ominous but have not been widely publicized -- the statements by the mayors of Shanghai, Amoy, Foochow, and Guangdong, that Taiwan authorities had "betrayed the Motherland." PRC local authorities have previously served as a moderating force on the Taiwan issue, benefiting as they do from Taiwan investment. Whether voluntarily or not, they seem to have signalled an end to their support. China clearly recognizes its loss of ground on the international political front in recent years. Looking ahead, it probably sees more of the same if it does not act now.

Lee may now believe -- or the PRC may credibly think he believes -- that completion of the road to independence would be his crowning legacy. He would need at least one more term in office, however, to fulfill that dream. In fact, Lee no longer repeats his 1996 vows to retire at the end of this term (just as he "changed his mind" in 1996 after implying in 1990 that he would not run again) and constitutional interpretations clearly seem to allow for another term under this new Constitution. Even if he does not run, however, the PRC knows he would simply support a younger ally who might only move the independence process along faster. There are only two

²Jiang An, "China-Taiwan tension: All-out War Not Likely to Happen. But Tense Situation Would Continue to Prevail for Some Time," Straits Times 11 Mar. 1996, p33

alternatives to such a KMT victory -- a DPP victor who would move even more quickly toward independence (though the DPP's paucity of experience and skill might actually work to the PRC's advantage), or the remote possibility of a New Party government still in search of an identity separate from mossbacks crying to "retake the Mainland." A PRC delay until next spring's election thus may only strengthen Taiwan's momentum toward independence.

Perhaps even worse, from the PRC's point of view -- waiting until next year also means any PRC attack would take place during a U.S. presidential election year. President Clinton will not, of course, be running for reelection. Rather than shying away from action due to the election, however, it is more likely that the heated politics of an election year would force him to react more actively than he might otherwise wish. In March 1996, the last presidential election year, the PRC exercises prompted the Administration to send two carrier groups to the vicinity. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) certainly watched that reaction with interest and concern. Any PLA attack on Taiwan thus must take into account an inclination in the Congress and among much of the U.S. population to support Taiwan at least as actively as in 1996. As a result, Beijing may believe that a quick 1999 attack -- accompanied by direct threats about the consequences of a U.S. intervention -- would be less likely to provoke the U.S. than if it waits for next year. Despite the resolute U.S. reaction to the 1996 military exercises, the PRC may also believe that a second U.S. intervention is unlikely. Supporting that view are 1) our past inconsistencies on Taiwan, 2) our well-known reluctance to send troops overseas, and 3) our shrunken military, which still faces significant tension in Korea, in the Gulf, and now also faces a likely "nation-building" mission in Cuba following Castro's sudden demise and the outbreak of civil war.

Perhaps the strongest PRC motive is internal -- the shoring up of a regime still in the throes of an incomplete succession. Despite Deng Hsiaoping's death over a year ago, the long-term picture remains just as unclear as it did for a similar period after Mao's passing in 1976. No one, least of all Zhao, can afford to look soft on Taiwan independence. Moreover, the decline of China's Communist ideology has left nationalism as its primary unifying force. Nationalistic passion, a useful tool at times, instead is the master on Taiwan policy. Those perceived as tougher advocates of force are in a position to demand action, and seem likely to have PLA support -- a PLA much strengthened by double-digit budget increases it has enjoyed every year.

since 1989³ If Beijing authorities, no matter how "moderate," believe they must choose between attacking Taiwan or acquiescing in its permanent loss, they almost certainly will attack, even if they face probable military defeat That is doubly true for the PLA⁴ Ten years ago, however, PRC defeat might have been unavoidable That may no longer be true

MEANS

Just as the PRC has a motive to attack Taiwan, it increasingly has the means Modernization has changed the PLA's face in recent years In 1979, for example, the PLA was in such disrepair that its leaders were embarrassed before the world when they tried to "teach Vietnam a lesson " Recent budget increases, however, have focussed on developing a few key rapid reaction/special forces units, upgrading China's air power, and increasing the reach of the navy The special forces units, probably of brigade size, are comparatively new to the PLA scene but in contrast to the rest of the PLA are highly trained and well-equipped Four major functions have been described for these so-called "fist" units 1) "door openers," to strike critical targets and open a breach in enemy positions, 2) "scalpels," to strike targets in an effort to paralyze an enemy's combat potential, 3) "steel hammers," to seize crucial positions, and 4) "boosters," to act as force multipliers and speed up campaigns by opening new battle zones Air mobile forces have received particular attention⁵

The PLA Marines also were reestablished as a separate navy arm in 1980 and have been trained as an amphibious force capable of "sudden landings "⁶ Elsewhere on the navy side, the purchase of several Kilo-class submarines from Russia gives China a blockade capability it previously

³Paul H B Godwin, "Force Projections and China's National Military Strategy," unpublished paper prepared for 6th Staunton Hill Conference on the Chinese People's Liberation Army, June 9-11, 1995, p 10-11

⁴Patrick E Tyler, "China, the U S and New Confrontation over Taiwan," International Herald Tribune 16 Feb 1996

⁵Godwin, "Force Projection," p 7

⁶Godwin, "Force Projection," p 7

lacked. The delivery last year of the now completed "Varyag" aircraft carrier, along with two Kiev-class carriers,⁷ all of which have undergone their shakedown cruises, may also give PRC naval officers new confidence that they can deliver air power to Taiwan targets. A number of such Chinese naval force modernization moves have been detailed in published articles.⁸

Separately, the addition of 72 F-15-equivalent Su27's and the early stages of co-production of 200 MiG-31 interceptors,⁹ though not yet equal to the 216 F-16 and Mirage 2000 fighters Taiwan acquired in 1997, give China the beginning of a modern air arm. The purchase of six heavy lift-transport aircraft and some 24 Mil-17 helicopters, along with the now confirmed purchase of Russian AWACS aircraft, in-air refueling aircraft, and additional MiG-29 fighters also underline China's intent to field a modern air force.¹⁰

Perhaps most important of all is the shift in PRC military doctrine from a largely defensive posture to a "doctrine of rapid response." This doctrine "relies on the mobility of existing forces and is basically offensive in nature." It "envision[s] the deployment of combined air, sea, and land forces" for a conflict that "would start without warning and would finish quickly."¹¹

OPPORTUNITY

Just as the motive is clearly available, and the means seem within reach, so the PRC's opportunity to successfully force Taiwan reunification probably has never been stronger. There are several reasons for this new state of affairs:

- Taiwan's relaxed travel controls make it easier for the PRC to infiltrate troops into Taiwan,
- the opening of direct cross-Strait shipping also makes it possible to bring cargo ships carrying

⁷Godwin, "Force Projection," p 14

⁸Renato Cruz de Castro, "Interactive Naval Developments of three Northeast Asian States," Contemporary Southeast Asia, Vol 17, No 3 (Dec 1995) 319-336

⁹Cruz de Castro, p 325

¹⁰Godwin, "Force Projection," p 14

¹¹Cruz de Castro, p 322

hidden troops and equipment directly into Taiwan's main ports,

- the more aggressive PRC military doctrine and organization may mean an attack could be carried out on much shorter notice than previously thought,

- the PRC has already moved large numbers of fighter aircraft to southern China. While they are not positioned directly opposite Taiwan -- as they would need to be -- airfields nearest the Taiwan Strait have received increased fuel storage capacity and supplies in the past year,

- 40 of the PRC's 52 submarines are at sea, as are all but two resupply ships. Most of the additional subs and ships could be quickly launched,

- repeated cutbacks in Taiwan's military service requirement over the past ten years have reduced its military readiness both quantitatively and qualitatively,

- continued cutbacks in U S military strength, including the return of several installations to Japan, has reduced our ability to respond quickly with overwhelming force,

- the Japan government's continued shaky status leaves its response questionable at best and it might refuse to allow the U S to launch a military response from Japanese territory (in contrast to a Korean conflict where we believe Japan would not oppose use of Japanese territory),

- other countries in the region almost certainly would respond with verbal protests and perhaps temporary suspensions of trade, but nothing more

SCENARIO

As noted above, most hypothetical scenarios for a PRC attack include either a long-term blockade or a massive amphibious assault. Either method, while probably successful if the conflict remained a strictly bilateral Taiwan-PRC fight, would allow time for a U S counter-move. In fact, a PLA military analyst has specifically pointed this problem out to a U S counterpart who had written academic analyses of those scenarios.¹² Although the PLA obviously would prefer that the U S remain on the sidelines, its officers probably see that as a vain hope in light of the U S decision to send CBGs to the vicinity of the 1996 exercises. Thus the PLA

¹²Chinese military analyst to unnamed U S analyst (as told directly to author 4/3/96)

would benefit by planning a quick attack that might finish the conflict before the U S is able to move forces to the area

A plan for such an attack might well include

-- advance infiltration of four to five brigades of "fist" special ops forces This would not be as difficult as it may sound at first blush It is well-known that every year thousands of illegal Chinese enter Taiwan by fishing boat They blend into the population reasonably well, though a careful observer can pick out many such "country cousins" due to rougher dress and speech habits In fact, the Taiwan population has become so used to large numbers of illegal Mainland workers that groups of young men in jeans and T-shirts might occasion little comment Just as the troops can be brought in over time and in small groups, it would not be difficult to infiltrate the necessary light arms, plastic explosives, ammunition and other supplies, and perhaps even Stinger missiles and other equipment

-- Upon receiving a "go" signal (perhaps on October 25, the Taiwan Retrocession Day holiday?), squad and company-sized SOF units could swing into action against pre-arranged targets Presumably there would be no public announcement until the first attacks took place SOF targets would include

1) Taiwan's new F-16s and Mirages, ASW aircraft, and other air defense facilities, including underground hangars and facilities near Taipei and in southern Taiwan Additional small squads armed with Stingers might also hide near the end of such runways to shoot down any fighters that manage to get airborne Though such squads presumably would be destroyed or disarmed within a short time, they would give the PRC additional time to gain air superiority,

2) port and naval facilities of a defensive nature, including wreaking as much havoc as possible among Taiwan's frigates, destroyers, and other coastal defenses,

3) radar facilities, especially those located on YangMingShan just north of Taipei, near Cheng Cheng-kung (CCK) air base and other air defense facilities, and near Taichung and Kaohsiung A squad in the Penghu Islands might seek to disable similar facilities there, though the Penghus otherwise probably would be bypassed,

4) airstrips, both civilian and military, including the emergency strips built into the North-South highway,

5) various transportation and power targets such as subways, highways, bridges, railroads, dams, and power stations, the destruction of which would cause mass confusion and gridlock,

6) civilian radio and TV broadcast facilities,

7) government buildings, especially the Defense and Foreign Ministries, the Legislative and Executive Yuans, and the Presidential building, the destruction of which would tend to prevent Taiwan's national command authority from carrying out its command and control functions,

8) base perimeters, which could be quickly mined. Select "fist" units might also carry binary CW or even BW of a non-persistent non-lethal nature aimed at disabling large numbers of Taiwan troops and air force support personnel for several days to weeks,

Perhaps most important, special "decapitation" squads would also target key military and civilian leaders for assassination or kidnapping. President Lee, along with the Vice President, the Premier, the provincial governor, and key members of the Legislature and the National Assembly would, if possible, be captured and taken to pre-arranged facilities to await orders. DPP and New Party leaders would be killed if they could not be quickly co-opted.

It is important to note that over one third of Taiwan's forces, those located on Matsu and Jinmen (Quemoy), would be bypassed and out of the fight from the beginning. Shortly after the beginning of the campaign, artillery barrages and mock assaults on those islands would ensure that those units could not be transferred back to Taiwan in time to take part in the fight. Taiwan fighters would be engaged by the PRC's less capable but much more numerous older fighters and eventually overwhelmed.

Simultaneous with the destruction of Taiwan's radar and air defense capability, additional PRC units would emerge from hiding on PRC "cargo" ships in Taiwan's three main harbors -- Keelung, Taichung, and Kaohsiung -- to take over the port facilities. Merchant ships with troops secretly loaded in the Pearl River and other more distant areas, and already en route, would then be signalled to enter the ports within a day. The quick air superiority gained by the PRC would allow it to send its heavy air-lift units to reinforce troops already on the ground. Parachute drops would supplement that capability. Meanwhile, PRC fist units on Taiwan's east coast would

destroy the port facilities at Taidong, Hualien, and Suao, as well as cutting the rail lines and highways, thus attempting to preclude the U S or other countries from reinforcing Taiwan from the east

With coordinated attacks taking place all around them, power outages, traffic at a standstill, and no ability to flee the fighting, the civilian population would be unable to do anything but listen to broadcasts by PRC announcers quickly installed in all civilian broadcast facilities. Until the late 1980s Taiwan had provided military or police guards for such facilities, although they were notoriously inefficient and ill-trained, even seemingly unable to handle their own weapons without danger to themselves or the public ¹³ By the mid-1990s, however, even those personnel had been withdrawn. Satellite dishes, in the meantime, would be systematically disabled so as to prevent outside news from reaching Taiwan.

The Mainland announcers, installed as part of a broad psyops campaign, would warn all civilians to remain indoors until further notice and repeatedly assure the public that they were in no danger. Leaflets would be spread everywhere. Mainland journalists, waiting in Foochow, would also be brought in to run Taiwan's press. The press, broadcasts, and leaflets would all claim that military activities were the responsibility of Taiwan forces loyal to a one-China policy and determined to block efforts to "split China." A captive Taiwan general or two, intimidated into supporting the PLA move (or a long-time PRC sympathizer already in place) would announce that he had led the "uprising." Taiwan political leaders -- particularly including the President, Vice President, Premier, Governor, or Cabinet members -- would be urged to join the move, with continued position and influence promised to those who would do so. At least a few would sign on from various motives -- a desire for money or power, fear, or in some cases perhaps even a sincere belief that they could best protect the public by doing so.

The public at large, while unhappy at the sudden turn of events, could do little. The vast majority probably would be inclined toward passive acceptance. Needless to say, any active resistance attempts would be dealt with via instant executions and retribution against neighbors.

¹³A tragic 1992 example of police inexperience and incompetence resulted in the death of an American boy. This was only one of several incidents where police guards either did not know how to handle their weapons or actually engaged in criminal activity themselves.

and relatives suspected of sympathizing with or failing to report resistance activities. For the most part, however, PLA units would be instructed to follow Mao's dicta regarding the treatment of civilians. Once a routine began to appear, most of the public would acquiesce. This would not, after all, be a foreign occupation ala the Nazi occupation of France. Even though Taiwan's cultural identity has diverged from the Mainland's (Taiwan has been governed separately for 100 of the past 104 years) most Taiwan residents still consider themselves fully Chinese.

Once the PLA gained effective control, assuming it could do so, it would quickly begin preparing defensive positions and bringing in additional equipment in case the U S should attempt a rescue. By then, however, such a rescue might be almost impossible.

US REACTION

Whether or not the PRC can realistically hope to win with such a scenario, just the belief that it could win might be sufficient to convince Beijing to try. Such an attack, even if beaten back, would severely destabilize the region as a whole, as well as a host of bilateral relationships (including not only the obvious disruption of our relationship with China, but also straining our relations with Japan and raising tensions on the Korean peninsula). The time to prevent this is now, not after PRC leaders take possibly irrevocable internal decisions to use force.

First we -- the USG -- must examine our own assumptions about the region as a whole and China's place in it. Too many Congressional leaders seem to believe that U S power is unchallengeable in East Asia and that they can continue to treat China as a supplicant, dependent on the U S for favors or security. That simply is no longer the case. China demands to be respected and treated as a great power. At the same time, some Administration policymakers, including a few China hands who have been personally involved in the issue since the beginning, seem to have let their personal stake in the relationship's history override their sense of what the American people and their elected representatives demand. Simultaneously, narrow single-agency visions prevail -- USTR on trade disputes, Commerce on exports, Interior on endangered species, ACDA on proliferation. State, constantly whipsawed by the issue of the moment, has lost its ability (and resolve) to set a tone for the overall relationship.

Before events proceed any further down what could be a tragic path, you could urge Washington to bring together important policymakers from all agencies, joined by key Congressional leaders, to discuss the overall China issue and relationship. A couple of the fringe Congressional members may need to be included, but only if they can be convinced of the importance of the issue and the need for confidentiality, at least for the short term.

If reconsideration of this issue in light of my concerns prompts a consensus that a PRC attack is at least a possibility, several additional steps might be helpful including

1) Ordering Embassy Beijing officials to urgently seek meetings with key Chinese civilian and military leaders to

- a) assure them that we are not behind Taiwan's apparent continuing efforts to break free,
- b) that we continue to expect both sides to seek a peaceful resolution of this issue through consultation and compromise on both sides, and that we would not be able to stand aside if the region's stability were threatened by precipitous moves

- c) offer to cooperate on some issues chosen by the Washington group as of particular concern to China and not particularly deleterious to our interests,

2) Order other key embassies (particularly Tokyo, but also Seoul, Moscow, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, and Manila) to call on host government leaders and urge that they pass the PRC similar messages of their strong opposition to any hostile move against Taiwan

3) AIT Taipei should consult with Taiwan civilian and military leaders to

- a) warn them of our concerns and the need to scale back the rhetoric and moves that have been most offensive to Beijing,

- b) ascertain Taiwan's plans for countering the infiltration problem. Their efforts to date have been so slack as to seemingly indicate little awareness of the depth of the problem they may face. Even such measures as additional patrol boats, guards on the beaches, and military sweeps in the hills around Taipei and other key cities, bases, and facilities, would reduce their vulnerability.

4) We need to beef up our intelligence efforts that might help counter such a move. It may be too late in the game to develop additional PRC humint targeted against this problem. Providing Taiwan the technical means to conduct additional surveillance in the Strait would be helpful.

5) A more visible presence in the area, including more frequent carrier sailings through the

Strait also would send an important signal. Actually stationing a carrier near Taiwan for the next several months might be prudent.

6) Stepped up training of Taiwan's SOF forces to more effectively counter internal attacks would also be useful.

REACTING TO A PRC MOVE

Washington must also determine whether and under what circumstances it intends to come to Taiwan's aid. Such a decision must be kept entirely under wraps. A public statement either way would be eerily reminiscent of our pre-Korean War statement that Korea was outside our area of vital concern. In this case, a public decision to aid Taiwan would only embolden Taiwan independence advocates, while publicly standing aside would completely undermine our goal of peaceful evolution in the region.

COA #1 Presumably we would be prepared to support Taiwan, at least to the extent that we did in 1996. The greatest difficulty would be posed by a quick PRC victory scenario in which we found ourselves with insufficient time to rush troops and equipment to the scene to support Taiwan forces. An advance contingency authorization from Washington may be essential to avoiding that problem by giving you the ability to immediately scramble planes from any nearby carrier(s) plus to send fighters and bombers from Okinawa and elsewhere in Japan. With strong active air cover for Taiwan forces, plus broad band public announcements to boost Taiwan morale by letting them know that help was on the way, we might be able to delay PRC victory long enough to bring a MEU from Okinawa, assuming Washington approved. Without such quick air cover, however, a later rescue attempt would be far more difficult.

The lack of at least a limited advance authorization could mean we would be faced with either acquiescing in the occupation, or with a requirement that our troops attempt to liberate the island from an occupying Mainland force. At that point our COA would depend on whether Taiwan forces had completely surrendered or still held part of the island.

COA #2 If Taiwan forces managed to retain only a small part of the island, for example the northeast corner or the east coast, it still might be possible to assist them. Clearly all cross-Straits

PRC resupply would need to be interdicted and friendly air superiority established. This could be difficult, especially in light of the PRC's submarines, some of which are very quiet. Still, it should be doable if we are prepared to bring the proper forces to bear. Insertion of the MEU from Okinawa into either the port of Suao or Hualien should be possible, to be followed by additional reinforcements as necessary. Also, it would be essential to bring Taiwan's forces on Jinmen and Matsu into the fight, either by assisting them to move to Taiwan or -- less likely but not inconceivable -- launching them across the narrow sea channels into Mainland China itself.

We could count on at least some support from the Taiwan civilian population -- intelligence, covert support etc -- but there probably would be little civilian ability or inclination toward violent resistance. Given time, we probably could roll Mainland forces back from Taiwan, though at a serious cost. There also would have to be constant diplomatic effort directly with Beijing authorities and through third countries to ensure that the conflict was kept localized instead of spreading or going nuclear. We could not count on active military support of significance from any other regional country, however, as no countries have forces of sufficient size and ability to be of material assistance except Japan and South Korea. As already noted, Japan probably would find it impossible to make a decision to go up against China over the Taiwan issue. South Korea probably could not spare forces in the face of increased risk on the peninsula. Clear statements to North Korea warning of instant retaliation for any aggressive move there while we were occupied with Taiwan also would be essential.

COA #3 The collapse of Taiwan forces before we could get into the fight would make our job extremely difficult if not impossible. An amphibious Marine landing from Okinawa might be able to establish a bridgehead, but only at great cost in lives. Resupply would be a constant problem. Taiwan's rugged terrain also would present significant additional difficulties. In such a situation the benefits probably would no longer be worth the cost and we would be unlikely to receive the necessary support from the American public and from Congress. We must also recognize that within days of occupying Taiwan the PRC would formally reintegrate the government of the erstwhile "renegade province" into the "arms of the Motherland." No amount of diplomacy would convince China to return to the status quo ante bellum, and there would be

little international support for what would then turn into a campaign to "split China ". Moreover, the effort to do so would vastly increase the risks of going nuclear, a prospect hinted at even in 1996 when an unnamed midlevel Chinese official speculated about whether the U S was willing to trade Los Angeles for Taiwan

Regardless which scenario plays out, throughout the process it will be essential that we carefully assess public and Congressional support as well as how to retain and increase that support. A good assessment of the Taiwan public's likely reaction to a PRC invasion also is vital. Most Americans would be vocally opposed to a Chinese occupation of Taiwan and probably would be prepared to offer limited active military support to help Taiwan retain its freedom of action. If Taiwan is perceived as bringing the problem on itself, however, or if a major war against China would be required for us to support Taiwan, most Americans probably would fold their tents. American opponents of action would be quick to note that Taiwan has not been a treaty ally for nearly twenty years, and though we have a strong interest in its well being, that interest is not worth the risk of nuclear war.

In that eventuality, the PRC would have succeeded in its effort, though at a terrible (and nearly irrevocable in the short-term) cost to regional peace and stability and its relationship with the U S. We need to impress upon Washington the urgency of ensuring that that does not happen. Washington needs to be prepared to use the other tools at its disposal NOW -- diplomacy, perhaps threats of economic sanctions (although sanction threats might well be counterproductive), shows of force, and active military support of Taiwan's efforts to prevent a PRC move. The consequences of not planning for this problem now could be devastating, both literally and figuratively.

The best option, as in most conflicts, is conflict prevention.